

Sister Beatrice and Ardiane & Barbe Bleue



THE
POCKET EDITION OF WORKS
BY
MAURICE MAETERLINCK

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} Plays

Sister Beatrice and
S Ardiane & Barbe Bleue
Two Plays — Translated into
English Verse from the Manu-
script of Maurice Maeterlinck
By Bernard Miall — — —

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

I

"THESE two little plays," says the author, "are really librettos. Music is being written to them by M. Gilkas." The French version is in unrhymed alexandrines, if the term be permissible; that is, in unrhymed lines of twelve syllables. It is of course possible to employ this metre in English verse, but it is a medium as yet too little polished by use to refract, without theft or distortion, its immanent sense; it is, so to speak, one of your material metres, more ready to present itself in body than in spirit, being still in a primitive stage of evolution, and waiting the master-hand which shall teach it an easy

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delivery and self-effacement. In short, it is a metre neither so far familiar nor so far developed* as to justify its use by a transiator, whose duty is to interpret his author, in some remote degree, as his author might wish, rather than to experiment as himself might please.

For myself, I had no envy to attempt it, and so, with my author's approval, I have turned his play into such blank verse as I might; holding, with him, that our English unrhymed verse of ten syllables, iambic in scheme,—trochaic, dactylic, anapæstic, catalectic, and what not by incident,—is an equivalent sufficiently near, and perhaps the most proper, of the French unrhymed verse of twelve syllables. But I do not pretend that the author's mood may not be betrayed by the staccato effect of the shorter line. To the French alexandrine, of all metres, is possible at times,

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"linkéd sweetness long drawn out," which by a shorter metre, or, indeed, by any metre consisting, as ours, very largely of accent, is rarely attainable.

Readers may miss in "Sister Beatrice" what they are used to call the glamour the atmosphere, of the Maeterlinckian drama. They will miss it partly, no doubt, because I have translated it; but partly also because it is partly absent in the French; they may, perhaps, find more of it in the music, if they have the fortune to hear it. But the play unsung, unstaged,—it is, as I have said, a libretto—is the play of M. Maeterlinck's which most nearly approaches, in the matter of treatment, the avowedly obvious spirit of the English drama. That the story is all spiritual, or rather, that the spiritual in the play has a story, is no doubt the reason why the treatment may be material and articulate.

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Other plays of this author might be described — he himself, I think, might so describe them—as belonging to static or potential drama: the plays were the dramas of a state of 'feeling. Here, I think, we have for the first time in M. Maeterlinck's theatre the treatment of a legend already crystallised: a legend in England familiar to readers of Mr. John Davidson's poetry in "The Ballad of a Nun." It has also been treated by Miss Adelaide Anne Procter, and a singularly charming translation of the original Dutch version—for in Dutch we find it first told and first printed—may be found in the first volume of a publication called the "Pageant," issued some years ago. This version was translated by Mr. Laurence Housman and Mr. J. Simons; whether it be the oldest or the original version I am unable to say.

Translator's Preface

This to explain why "Sister Beatrice"
is not most obviously by M. Maeterlinck,
and by no one else.

LIDO, VENICE,
May 10, 1900.

II

IN translating "Ardiane and Barbe Bleue," which, like "Sister Beatrice," was written as a libretto, I have again used the ordinary "blank verse" line to represent the unrhymed French line of twelve syllables. But in the original text of this drama there are many passages in *vers libre*, both rhymed and otherwise. To make irregular metres readable in English requires no less than inspiration, and if inspiration is not always at the service of the poet it is still less often at the beck of the translator. In such passages I have therefore preserved, so far as

Translator's Preface

possible, the original measures, but have in all cases, or nearly all, retained or added rhyme.

It was not easy to decide whether I should call our familiar hero-villain Blue-beard or Barbe Bleue. As children we connect him with Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves; but if he be anything less than universal he would appear to be French. Some would relegate him merely to the post of an accidentally baptized variety of the Myth of the Closed Chamber;¹ some identify him with a certain Marshal and Constable of France,² companion-in-arms to the Duke of Brittany; some say he is Henry VIII.; at all events one

¹ See "The Forbidden Chamber": E. Sidney Hartland, *Folk-lore Journal*, 1885, vol. iii. Also Mr. Lang's edition of Perrault. It was from Perrault that M. Maeterlinck obtained the legend, which he has altered to suit himself.

² See "Un Maréchal et un Connétable de France. La Barbe Bleue de la légende et de l'histoire," in the British Museum.

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Gilles de ~~Lavalle~~, sieur de Rais, and lord in all of some eight goodly châteaux, for the most part in Brittany, constable and marshal as aforesaid, did commit certain atrocities upon certain women and children, though his wife survived him, and he was in 1440 executed therefor, at the age of thirty-six. One popular legend has it that the brothers of seven deceased wives arrived with Saint Gildas, whereupon the castle crumbled away, and the brothers killed the marshal and constable. Whether this feudal dignitary, who in his twenties was marshal, constable, and councillor to King Charles VII., was or was not the original of the Bluebeard legend, it is certain that of the ruins of his numerous castles all are known by the latter's name, and are connected with legends of his atrocities; and in one, the castle of Chantocé, which one Thiphaine or Triphine d'Anguille gave in 1400 to

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the forebears of one Marie' de Crain, who in marriage brought it to Gui, father of Rais, father of Barbe Bleue, or Gilles de Lavalle, may be seen to this day a long subterranean hall, communicating with another, low and square, which is entered by three staircases. Chantocé is built on a flat rock, surrounded by a moat, and was defended by two towers with drawbridges. It is interesting to note that the depravity of Gilles was attributed to the fervent study of pernicious literature in his youth.

As the story of Bluebeard pure and simple, as distinguished from that of Bluebeard Gilles, is found in Greek French, Tuscan, Icelandic, Estonian, Gaelic, and Basque, it seems unlikely that Gilles was the origin of the legend. It is most likely that the Myth of the Forbidden Chamber found, as all stories will sooner or later find, an exposition in

Translator's Preface

actual life; so that the real drama, in course of years and popular relation, took to itself some or all of the international *Forbidden Chamber* details, while the *Forbidden Chamber* stories were given, in many countries, a name, and in France a local habitation—or rather some eight or nine such.

The name of the victorious and final wife is variable. Often it is Anne. Sometimes she finds the corpses, sometimes the heads; the wives, who are usually seven, are sometimes her sisters and sometimes not. Sometimes her brothers kill the polygamous husband; sometimes she has no brothers, and restores the wives to life, as she does in one of the Gaelic versions. In the version of Perrault, which is probably the original of all our English versions, she finds the bodies of the wives, and her brothers execute justice.

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When I thought of retaining the French name of the hero, it was, as I say, to preserve the reader from reminiscences of the pantomime and the Arabian Nights, which somehow do not "march together" with the drama of M. Maeterlinck. I finally determined to retain "*Barbe Bleue*" for the name of our hero because the names of all the other characters are French, and untranslatable, and it seemed to me that the contrast of the English name of our hero would still further accentuate the illegitimate Arabian and pantomimic reminiscences that, for some of us, cling to it. Plain "*Bluebeard*" is hardly congruous with these other names; we have never thought of our childhood's monster as the warden of a harem of maidens out of a play by M. Maeterlinck. The point is difficult as it is nice, and also trivial, and perhaps it is best to leave the reader to give our hero the name that

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his individual taste dictates. My apology is to disarm the captious.

A word as to the versification of these two translations. They are for the most part written in what is popularly called "blank verse." At the same time, besides employing the slight variations which precedence allows in such verse, I have introduced, here and there, what I conceive to be a variation especially desirable in a translation, wherein one cannot always, or often, choose one's words, and is sometimes compelled to employ a phrase that would, if handled in the ordinary way, be unmusical in the extreme. This variation consists in the employment of the well-known principle of catalexis where not to employ that principle would result in cacophony. To render certain concatenations of consonants, especially those containing sibilants, tolerable to the ear, I have allowed for the time which their

Translator's Preface

pronunciation actually demands, by counting them as a syllable, so that the deca-syllabic line, though still having the time of ten syllables, has only nine syllables in it if estimated in the ordinary way. An example of such a line is :—

“ In silence shed before a queen’s feet.”

Another example is—

“ Open the fifth door.”—“ Not even there ? ”

I should not have referred to this matter had not a critic quoted one of the above lines as a proof that I was ignorant of the elementary rules of versification.

BERNARD MIALL.

LONDON, April 18, 1901.

SISTER BEATRICE
A MIRACLE PLAY IN THREE ACTS

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THE HOLY VIRGIN (in the likeness of
SISTER BEATRICE)

SISTER BEATRICE

THE ABBESS

SISTER EGLANTINE

SISTER CLEMENCY

SISTER FELICITY.

SISTER BALBINA

SISTER REGINA

SISTER GISELA

THE PRIEST

PRINCE BELLIDOR

LITTLE ALLETTE

Beggars, Pilgrims, &c.

TIME—*The Thirteenth Century.* PLACE—*A Convent in the neighbourhood of Louvain.*

SISTER BEATRICE

ACT THE FIRST

A corridor, in the centre of which is the great entrance-door of the convent. To the right, the door of the chapel, to which a few steps give access, makes an angle with the wall of the corridor. In the angle so formed an image of the VIRGIN, of the stature of an ordinary woman, stands within a niche, on a pedestal of marble, which is raised on steps and enclosed within a grille. The image is attired after the Spanish manner, in vestments of silk and precious brocades, which give it the semblance of a celestial princess. A broad girdle, wrought in

Sister Beatrice

gold, encircles the waist, and a golden fillet, on which glitter precious stones, confines, like a diadem, the tresses of woman's hair that fall about the shoulders of the image. To the left of the convent door is seen the cell of SISTER BEATRICE. The door of the cell is ajar. The white-washed cell is furnished with a chair, a table, and a pallet-bed. It is night. Before the VIRGIN a lamp is burning, and at her feet is prostrated SISTER BEATRICE.

BEATRICE

Pity me, Lady : me about to fall
In mortal sin, for he is coming back
To-night, to-night, and I am alone !
What must I say to him, what must I do ?
He looks at me with trembling hands,
and I—
I know not what it is that he desires.
Since I came first into this holy house

Sister Beatrice

Four years are nearly gone—ay, four years
quite

But for six weeks, when August meets
July.

Then I knew nothing : I was quite a
child :

And now I still know nothing ; nor I dare
Ask of the Abbess, nor to any tell
This matter that torments my heart—this
woe,

Or else, this happiness. It is, they say,
Allowed to love a man in marriage : he,
When first of all I leave the convent, says,
Before he even kiss me, there shall be
A hermit, one who does miraculous things,
One that he knows, who shall unite us
both.

We are told often of the lures of sin,
And of the snares of man : but him you
know ;

He is not like the others. Long ago,
When I was little, he would often come

Sister Beatrice

Into my father's garden of a Sunday ;
We played together there. Him I forgot,
But oftentimes I would remember that
When I was miserable, or in my prayers.
Pious he is and wise : his eyes are gentler
Than those of a little child that kneels to
pray.

Here at your feet he knelt the other
night,

Under the lamp : did you not see him
there ?

To look at, like your Son. Gravely he
smiles,

As if he spoke to God, though but to me,
To me who cannot answer him he speaks,
Me who have no possessions. See, I tell
you

All : for I seek not to deceive you : see,
I am very wretched, though for three days
now

I have been unable to cry any more.
Did I refuse to listen to his prayer

Sister Beatrice

He swore that he would die! And I
have heard

That such a thing may happen; such as
he,

Men that are beautiful, and tall, * and
young,

Have slain themselves because of love.
One day

They spoke of this to Francis and to
Paul.

If this be true I know not: but the earth
Is full of trouble, and they tell us naught.

O Mother, hear! I know not what to
do!

And who knows, Mother, that these
trembling hands

Held forth to your holy image shall not
be

Torches unquenchable in the blaze of Hell
To-morrow?

[*There is heard without the sound of
many approaching horsemen.*

Sister Beatrice

Listen ! Listen ! Do you hear ?
There are horses — many ! Now they
stop ! Ah, now
Feet on the threshold ! now they try the
*door !

[A knock on the great door.
What, what to do ? Mother, I will not
go,
I will not, if you wish it !

[She rises, and runs to the door.
Bellidor ?

BELLIDOR (*from without*)

Yes, open quickly, Beatrice ! it is I !

BEATRICE

Yes, yes !

[She throws wide open the door of
the convent, and BELLIDOR,
clad in a coat of mail and a
long blue cloak, is seen upon
the threshold. On his right

Sister Beatrice

hand is a boy laden with costly garments and glittering jewels. Not far from the door is an old man, who holds two richly-appointed horses by their bridles, and leads them to and fro beneath a tree. In the distance, under the starry sky, a limitless moonlit country.

BEATRICE (*advancing*)

You are not alone? Who is it there,
Under the tree?

BELLIDOR

Draw nigh, and have no fear!
[Kneeling upon the threshold he kisses
the hem of BEATRICE's robe.

O, beautiful, as you come forward so,
Beatrice! to front the stars that wait for
you

Sister Beatrice

As you upon the threshold trembling
stand !

Surely they know a mighty happiness
Has come to birth, and, like the dust of
gold

In silence shed before a queen's feet,
They are strewn over all the long blue ways
We go to travel through. What is it ?
Say !

What would you, what ? O, do your feet
already

Falter ? You turn your head ? O no,
no, no !

My arms enlace you, hold you forever
fast

In the sight of Heaven ! No ! you shall
not fly,

For my enchanting love delivers you !

O come, come, seek no more the shadows
dim

Of the lamps wherein love slumbered.
Love has seen

Sister Beatrice

The light he never saw before : the light
Whose every passing ray his triumph gilds,
Unites our youthful spirits, and ensures
Our destinies. O Beatrice, Beatrice !
Behold, I see you, I am near you, touch,
Embrace you and salute you the first time !

*[At these words he abruptly rises,
seizes BEATRICE about the
body, and kisses her on the lips.]*

BEATRICE (*recoiling, and feebly defending
herself*)

No, do not kiss me ! You had promised
me !

BELLIDOR (*redoubling his kisses*)

O, those were never promises of love !
Love cannot say that love will not adore,
And lovers make no promises ; never they
Shall promise aught who once have given
all !

Love every moment gives the all it has,

Sister Beatrice

And if it promise to reserve or stay
One kiss, it gives a hundred thousand more
To efface the wrong done to its lips itself.

[*Embracing her more ardently and seeking to draw her away.*

Come, come ! The night is passing, and
the sky

Already paler, and the horses fret.

There is now one step only more to take,
One to descend—

[*Suddenly observing that BEATRICE is failing in his arms.*

You do not answer me ?

I do not hear you breathe : your knees
give way !

Come ! Never wait until the envious
dawn

Outlays its golden snares across the path
That leads to happiness !

BEATRICE (*who is almost swooning*)

No, I cannot yet !

Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR

Love, you grow pale ! and all my kisses
die

Quenched on your lips like sparks in waters
cold.

Raise your fair face, and give me your
dear mouth,

That strives 'to smile no more. Oh ! it
is this,

This heavy veil that so constrains your
throat,

And weighs upon your heart. 'Twas
made for death,

Never for life !

*[With slow and cautious movements
he unwraps the veil which
envelops the face of BEATRICE,
who is still unconscious. Presently the first tresses of hair
begin to fall, then others and
still others, till at last all, like**

Sister Beatrice

*flames unimprisoned, fall suddenly over BEATRICE's face.
She seems to awaken.*

BELLIDOR (*with a cry of ecstasy*)

O !

BEATRICE (*softly, as if she came from
a dream*)

Ah, what have you done,
Bellidor ? What is this my hands perceive ?
This softness that is tender with my face ?

BELLIDOR (*passionately kissing her
dishevelled hair*)

Behold, behold ! It is your proper fire
Awakens you, and you are overwhelmed
With your own beauty ! Lo, you are
enmeshed
With your own radiance ! O, you never
knew,
I never knew, how beautiful you were !

Sister Beatrice

I thought that I had seen you, and I
thought

I loved you! Ay, and but a moment
gone

You were the fairest of my boyish dreams :
Most beautiful of all most beautiful
I find you now to my awakened eyes,
And to my hands that touch you, and in
my heart

That now discovers you ! Ah, wait, wait,
wait!

You must in all be like your face—must
be

Utterly liberated, wholly queen !

[He removes BEATRICE's mantle with
a sudden gesture, and she ap-
pears clad in a robe of white
woollen ; then, while he makes
a sign in the direction of the
door, and the boy who was
with him at the opening of the
scene draws near, bearing costly

Sister Beatrice

raiment, a golden girdle, and a necklace of pearls, BEATRICE falls to kneeling on the flags, prostrate and sobbing, her face hidden in the folds of the mantle and veil, which she has gathered up.

BEATRICE

No, no! I would—I would not!

[Moving on her knees to the VIRGIN's feet.

O, you see,
Lady! I cannot struggle any more!
No, not without you succour me! I can
pray

No more, no more, if you abandon me!

BELLIDOR (*bastening to BEATRICE and wrapping her in the costly garments which he has taken from the child*)

It is time, Beatrice! See the raiment, see
The raiment of your life that now begins!

Sister Beatrice

You are no slave I rescue from her lord,
You are a queen I bring to happiness !

BEATRICE (*still kneeling, her hands clinging to the grille that encloses the base of the image*)

Our Lady, hear me ! I can speak no more,
And no more can I any longer pray ;
No, I can only sob. I did not know
I loved him quite like this ; I did not
know

That I loved you so much. O listen,
look !

All that I ask you is a sign, a sign,
A sign of your hand, a smile of your eyes,
no more !

I am only a girl who does not understand . . .

They have so often told me that you
grant

Everything, and that you were very kind,
That you were pitiful . . .

Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR (*endeavouring to raise her up, and to draw her gently away from the grille*)

Ay, so she is,
For she is queen of a heaven that love has
made !

Unclasp these tender hands the iron chills,
Look in her face—it is in no wise wroth,
It smiles, it shines ; her eyes have seen
the prayer

That shines in yours ; it is as though
your tears

Illumed her eyes that smile. Is it not
she

That asks, and you that pardon ? In
my eyes

You are confounded, and I seem to see
Two sisters, and I know that love is
here ;

And they bless one another with their
hands.

Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE (*raising her head and looking at the Virgin*)

I was told often I was like her.

BELLIDOR

Look !

Regard, across your own, her tresses, thus,
While so my hands outspread the shimmering veil.

Would you not say, rays of the self-same light,

The self-same bliss ?

[*While he speaks three hours are struck on the convent clock.*

BEATRICE (*suddenly rising*)

Listen !

BELLIDOR

Three hours !

BEATRICE

The hour

Of matins that I should have sounded !

Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR

Come!

The dawn grows nigh, the windows pale
to blue!

BEATRICE

The windows I would always open wide
Before the dawn, so might the morning air,
Fresh, and the daylight, and the song of
birds

Welcome my sisters as they came from
sleep.

There is the cord that rings the bell to say
Night and their sleep are ended; there
the door,

The chapel door of which no more my
hands

Will push apart the leaves to greet the
dawn,

And altar-candles other hands will light.
Here is the basket of the poor: ay, soon
They will come hither, and will call my
name,

Sister Beatrice

And see no one at all, and vainly seek
These hands they are wont to bless when
I dispense

The humble garments that my sisters sew
In peace and silence of the spacious halls
The while they pray . . .

BELLIDOR

Come, for the day is nigh ;
Your sisters will awaken ; and it seems
Already that I hear their steps re-
sound . . .

BEATRICE

Ay, they are coming, ay, my sisters come,
Who loved me all so well, and held me too
So holy ! Here will they discover all
That of the lowly Beatrice remains ;
Her veil and mantle lying on the stones.

[Suddenly she takes up the veil and
mantle and deposits them on the
grille at the feet of the image.

Sister Beatrice

But no ; I would never one of them should
think

I trampled underfoot the robe of peace
They gave me, Mother—see, I give them
you,

And you will keep them. In your hands
I place

All my possessions, all that I received
In these four years.

I lay my chaplet here,

My chaplet with the cross of silver ; here
My discipline, and here the three great
keys

I carried at my girdle : this the key
That opens the great door ; the garden,
this,

And this, the chapel. I shall see no
more

The garden growing green, and no more
now

Unlock the chapel where we used to
sing

Sister Beatrice

'Mid odour of the incense. You know all,
Lady, and I know nothing.

There on high
Is it writ that naught is pardoned ? And
that love

Is cursed, and that none may expiate it ?
Tell tell, O tell me ! For I am not
lost

Except you will it ! I am not now lost
If you but make a sign ! I do not ask
Aught of impossible miracle, only this :
A single sign were all enough ; a sign
So small that none should see it ! If the
shadow

Cast by the lamp, slumbering on your
brow,

Move but a line I will not go away !
I will not go away ! O look at me !
Mother ! I gaze and gaze ! I wait !

*[She gazes for a long while at the
VIRGIN's face. All is motionless
and silent.]*

Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR (*embracing her and kissing her passionately on the lips*)

Come !

BEATRICE (*for the first time returning his kiss*)

*Yes !

[Enlaced in one another's arms, they go forth into the dawning world. The door is left open. Soon is heard the sound of horses that gallop away away into the distance. The curtain falls, and shortly afterwards the bell of the convent is heard in the dawn, loudly ringing matins.

END OF THE FIRST ACT

ACT THE SECOND

*The last strokes of the bell ringing' matins
are heard. Then the curtain rises.
The scene is that of the last Act, save
that now the great door of the convent
is closed, and all the corridor windows
are open to the first rays of the sun.*
Hardly has the curtain risen when the
VIRGIN, as at the end of a long, divine
sleep, is seen to stir, to come to life ;
then slowly she descends the steps of the
pedestal, and reaches the grille, and
over her glorious robe and tresses she
puts on the veil and mantle that
BEATRICE has abandoned. Then, as
she begins to sing softly under her
breath, she turns to the right, stretching
forth her hand, when, through the door*

Sister Beatrice

of the chapel, which opens to her gesture, are seen the tapers of the altar ; which are magically one by one being kindled ; then, continuing her holy song, she revives the flame of the lamp, and having placed before the pedestal the basket which contains the garments to be given to the poor, she advances to the great door of the convent.

THE VIRGIN (*singing*)

I hold to every sin,
To every soul that weeps,
My hands with pardon filled
Out of the starry deeps.

There is no sin that lives
If love have vigil kept ;
There is no soul that dies
If love but once have wept.

Sister Beatrice

And though in many paths
Of earth love lose its way,
Its tears shall find me out,
And shall not go astray.

[During the last words of the song a hand knocks timidly at the gate of the convent. The VIRGIN opens ; and there appears on the threshold a little girl, barefooted, and very ragged and poor. She is half hidden behind the oaken door-post ; she advances only her head, and gazes at the VIRGIN with astonishment.

THE VIRGIN

Good day, Allette, why do you hide yourself?

[Enraptured and afraid, making the sign of the cross as she approaches.

Sister Beatrice

ALLETTE

Why have you put that light upon your
robe?

THE VIRGIN

After the dawn there is light everywhere.

ALLETTE

Why have you put those stars into your
eyes?

THE VIRGIN

There are often stars in the depth of eyes
that pray.

ALLETTE

Why have you put that light inside your
hands?

THE VIRGIN

There is always light in the hands of alms-
givers.

ALLETTE

I have come alone here.

Sister Beatrice

THE VIRGIN

Where are our poor brothers?

ALLETTE

They dare not come because of what folk
say.

THE VIRGIN

What do they say?

ALLETTE

They say that they have seen
Beatrice riding on the Prince's horse.

THE VIRGIN

Am I not like the lowly Beatrice?

ALLETTE

They say they have seen her—that she
spoke to them.

THE VIRGIN

Only God saw her not, and nothing heard.

[*Taking the child in her arms and
kissing her on the forehead.*

Sister Beatrice

O little one, Allette, there is no one else
To-day that I can kiss. Ay, innocence
Cannot betray me, though it comprehend.

[*Looking into the child's eyes.*

How pure the human soul when thus one
sees it !

Most beautiful the angels are, but they
Never know tears. Poor child, enough,
enough !

Behold yours falling ; you shall know
their number !

[*She sets the child down on the threshold.*
But our poor brothers—where are they ?

Allette,
Go forth to them, and tell them all of
love
Full of impatience : go, and bid them
haste.

ALLETTE (*who turns her head and looks
away from the convent*)

O Sister Beatrice, they are coming—see !

Sister Beatrice

[*And indeed the poor, the sick and infirm, the women carrying little children, have timidly drawn nigh, and, thinking that they recognise BEATRICE, fearful, hesitating, and astonished, they approach the threshold, and, halting outside the door, they gaze and wait.*

THE VIRGIN (*leaning over the poor-basket, which contains clothes*)

What has befallen? Brothers, wherefore stay?

Hasten! the sun* already mounts: the time

Is ripe for prayer; shortly my sisters pass.
The door will soon be shut; then, till the morrow,

No more of alms. O come you, all of you!

O hasten, all of you; the time is now.

Sister Beatrice

A POOR OLD MAN (*coming forward*)

Now, sister, we to-night have seen two
ghosts . . .

THE VIRGIN (*giving him a cloak, which suddenly becomes radiant as she draws it out of the basket*)

Dream now no more of phantoms of the
night.

A CRIPPLE (*advancing in turn*)

We have had wicked thoughts this night,
my sister.

THE VIRGIN (*drawing from the basket another garment, which seems suddenly to become covered with jewels*)

Open your eyes, my brother : it is now
The hour of pardon. Come, O all of
you, come !

Sister Beatrice

A POOR WOMAN

I, sister, for my mother need a shroud . . .

ANOTHER POOR WOMAN

I beg you, sister, that our latest-born . . .

[The poor folk, lamenting, and greedy of charity, their arms outheld, press in a crowd about the VIRGIN, who, leaning over the basket, fills her arms from it again and again with garments glittering with rays of light, sparkling veils, and robes of linen that grow luminous. In measure as the VIRGIN exhausts the basket it overflows with a still greater abundance of raiment, more and more costly, and more and more resplendent; and as though intoxicated by the

Sister Beatrice

*miracle she herself has worked,
she cries out, as she distributes
her treasures to the poor folk,
filling their hands, covering
their shoulders, and wrapping
their infants in dazzling and
blazing tissues.*

THE VIRGIN

O come you hither, hither, all of you
come !

The snowy shroud is here, and here behold
The smiling swaddling-bands ! Ay, here
behold

Life, death, and life again ! Come hither
all !

It is the hour of love : and what of love ?
It has no limits ! Come you, all of you,
come !

Give one another aid ! and all offence
Let each forgive the other ! And through
life

Sister Beatrice

Mingle your happinesses and your tears!
Love one another: pray for those that
fall.

Come all, come hither, all of you pass by!
Come, all of you! God does not see the
ill

Done without hatred. Pardon one another:
There is no sin forgiveness does not reach.

*[Now the poor people, stupefied and
bewildered, are covered with
resplendent garments. Some,
their raiment rustling with
precious stones, waving and
swaying as they go, flee into
the open, shouting for joy.
Others, sobbing for gratitude,
surround the holy VIRGIN, and
seek to kiss her hands. But
the greater number, silent, and
as though smitten with a divine
terror, kneel upon the steps of
the entrance and murmur their*

Sister Beatrice

prayers. Then a stroke of the bell is heard ; the basket is suddenly exhausted ; the VIRGIN gently disperses the poor folk who press about her, and closes the door on them.

THE VIRGIN

Go in peace, brethren : 'tis the hour of prayer.

[*The murmur of the poor folk at prayer is still heard through the closed door. The murmur little by little becomes an indistinct hymn of gratitude and ecstasy. A second, then a third stroke of the bell resounds ; and proceeding from the left end of the corridor the NUNS, with the ABBESS at their head, advance toward the chapel.*

Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS (*halting before the VIRGIN, who, with bended head, and bands disposed upon her breast, waits by the closed door*)

Hear, Sister Beatrice. This month of sun
Matins are rung a quarter short of three.
Now you shall three days fast, shall three
nights pray

Before the Virgin's feet that was a
mother.

THE VIRGIN (*bowing with the humblest
gestures of assent*)

My Mother, God be praised !

[THE ABBESS, resuming her steps,
reaches the pedestal, which before was hidden from her by
the wall from which springs the vaulting of the great doorway.
There she is about to kneel,
when, upon raising her eyes,

Sister Beatrice

*she stops, cries aloud, lets fall
the book that she carries, and
makes a gesture of unspeakable
surprise and horror.*

THE ABBESS

She is not there !

[*Disquieted, then terrified, the NUNS
run to the ABBESS, surrounding
her and crowding about the
pedestal. The first moment of
stupefaction having passed, they
all speak, cry aloud, moan, and
lament at the same moment, by
turns outraged, terrified, sob-
bing, upright, kneeling, pros-
trated, or staggering.*

THE NUNS

She is no longer there !

The Virgin gone !

Her image has been stolen !

Infidels !

Sister Beatrice

Our Mother, O our Mother !

Sacrilege !

The cloister is profaned !

O Sacrilege !

The roof will fall upon us !

Sacrilege !

Sacrilege !

Sacrilege !

Sacrilege !

THE ABBESS (*calling aloud*)

Sister Beatrice !

[*The VIRGIN advances, and halts before the pedestal, close to the ABBESS. She gazes fixedly at the spot where her image used to stand, and her impassive eyes and face, as though sealed from the outer world, are, as it were, radiant with an imper-turbable hope and silence.*

Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS

You, Sister Beatrice, were she in charge,
And it was yours by day or night to wake
And watch above the majesty of her
Who made this convent-house her treasury
Of graces, and to house her predilections :
I understand your anguish, and your fear
I share. Yet fear you naught ! The
Will Divine

Has oftentimes designs that must confound
Our vigilance and zeal. But answer me ;
Speak, for you must have seen ; speak,
you must know !

[*The VIRGIN is silent.*

Answer me ! Speak ! What is amiss
with you ?

It seems to me there is somewhat strange
—it seems

At moments that your face grows
radiant . . .

Sister Beatrice

And say, what are these garments, now
no more

The same as all we wear? Why, do my
eyes

Deceive me? One that looks at you
would say

You are no more the same. What have
you there,

There, there, beneath your mantle, this
that gleams

So brightly through it?

[*She feels the VIRGIN's mantle.*

Ay, and what this stuff

Whose folds translucent run ablaze with
light,

When my hands touch it?

[*She opens the VIRGIN's mantle, and be-
holds the girdle of wrought gold.*

Mercy! What is this?

[*She removes the mantle entirely, and
in the same moment of out-
raged stupefaction she snatches*

Sister Beatrice

off the veil which covers the VIRGIN's hair, and the latter, always motionless, and as though insensible, appears suddenly clothed after the manner of and exactly in all points resembling her image that occupied the pedestal during the First Act. At this spectacle there falls on the ABBESS and the NUNS who crowd round her a moment of silent stupefaction and incredulous anguish. Then the ABBESS, who is the first to regain control over herself, covers her face with a gesture of despairing horror and malediction, and cries :

Lord God !

THE NUNS

Our Lady ! She has robbed the image !
Speak, Sister Beatrice !

Sister Beatrice

She does not answer !

The Demons ! O, the Demons !
Beware the walls !

They will avenge themselves !

O madness, madness !

O horror, horror ! Let us not await
The thunder-bolt ! O sacrilege, sacrilege !
Sacrilege ! Sacrilege !

[*There is a movement of recoil, terror,
and flight among the Nuns; but
the ABBESS restrains them, raising
her hands and her voice.*

THE ABBESS

Listen all, my daughters !

Nay, do not fly ! Let us await our lot ;
Let us not separate ; let all our hands
And all our prayers hedge in the sacrilege,
And strive to appease the ensuing wrath !

SISTER CLEMENCY

Mother, you will not tarry !

I pray,

Sister Beatrice

SISTER FELICITY

Let us go

To find the priest !

SISTER CLEMENCY

I saw him passing by
Deep in the chapel.

THE ABBESS

You are right ; yes, go,
Sisters Felicity and Clemency.
Go quickly ; yes, go quickly ; he will know
Better than we what should be done to
stay,
If yet it be not all too late to stay,
The sword of the Archangel, and to foil
The triumph of the Accursèd One. Ah
me !

My sisters, my poor sisters ! Horror has
A name no longer, and our eyes have
plumbed
The deepest abysses of hell !

Sister Beatrice

SISTER GISELA (*approaching the VIRGIN*)
Profanatrix !

SISTER BALBINA (*also approaching her*)
Sacrilege ! Sacrilege !

SISTER REGINA (*beside herself*)
Demon ! Demon ! Demon !

SISTER EGLANTINE (*in a mournful and
very gentle voice*)

O, Sister Beatrice, what have you done?
[At the sound of this voice the
VIRGIN turns her head, and
looks at SISTER EGLANTINE
with a smile of divine sweet-
ness.

SISTER BALBINA (*to SISTER EGLANTINE*)
She looks at you.

Sister Beatrice

SISTER GISELA

She seems to awake.

SISTER EGLANTINE

Perhaps

You did not know—

THE ABBESS

No, Sister Eglantine,
I will not have you speak to her !

[At this moment the PRIEST, wearing his priestly appointments, appears at the door of the chapel, followed by two NUNS and the terrified Choristers.

THE PRIEST

Pray, pray !

My sisters, pray for her !

THE ABBESS (*throwing herself on her knees*)

You know, my father . . .

Sister Beatrice

THE PRIEST (*in a stern voice*)

Hear, Sister Beatrice !

[*The VIRGIN remains motionless.*

THE PRIEST (*in a loud voice*)

Sister Beatrice !

[*The VIRGIN remains motionless.*

THE PRIEST (*in a terrible voice*)

Hear, Sister Beatrice ! Now, for the third
time

I call you, in the name of the living God,
Whose anger trembles round about these
walls—

I call you by your name !

THE ABBESS

She does not hear !

SISTER REGINA

She does not wish to hear !

Sister Beatrice

SISTER BALBINA

O misery !

O woe to all of us !

SISTER GISELA

Father ! Intercede !

Have pity on us !

THE PRIEST

Doubt is at an end.

Now do I recognise the gloomy pride
Of the Prince of Darkness and the Father
of Pride.

[*Turning to the Abbess.*

My sister, I deliver her to you,
And mark that man's indulgence nowise
may
Cheat the prerogatives of Love Divine.
Go, go, my sisters ; drag the culprit forth
To the foot of the holy altars ; then tear
off,

Sister Beatrice

There, in the presence of that One to
whom
The angels bow—there tear off, one by
one,
The vestments and the gems of sacri-
lege.
Unloose your girdles ; every scourge twist
tight,
And from the pillars of the portal
take
The heavy lashes of prevaricators,
And rods of grievous penance. May
your arms
Be cruel, may your hands be pitiless !
Mercy it is that lends them strength, and
Love
That blesses them ! Go forth, my sisters,
go !

[*The Nuns drag the VIRGIN away.*
She walks indifferent in their
midst, docile and impassive.
All, save SISTER EGLANTINE,

Sister Beatrice

have already untied the double-knotted cords which gird their loins. They enter the chapel, and the doors close ; only the PRIEST remains, and bows himself before the forsaken pedestal. There is for some time silence. Suddenly a song of unspeakable sweetness filters through the doors of the chapel. It is the sacred canticle of the VIRGIN, the *Ave Maris Stella*, which sounds as though sung by the distant voices of angels. Little by little the hymn becomes more distinct, draws near, grows fuller, becomes universal, as though an invisible host, ever more and more innumerable, took it up with a might ever more and more ardent, ever more and more celestial. At

Sister Beatrice

the same time there is heard from within the chapel the sound of seats overturned, of candelabras falling, of stalls thrown into confusion, and the exclamations of terrified human voices. Finally the two leaves of the door are violently thrown wide, and the nave appears all inundated with flames and strange splendours, which undulate, blossom forth, gyrate, and sweep past one another, infinitely more dazzling than the splendour of the sun whose rays light the corridor. Then, amid the delirious Alleluias and Hosannas which burst forth on every hand—confounded, haggard, transfigured, mad with joy and superhuman awe, waving armsful of blossoming boughs

Sister Beatrice

that overflow with miraculous flowers which increase their ecstasy, enveloped from head to foot in living garlands which fetter their steps, blinded by the rain of flower-petals which stream from the vaulting—the NUNS tumultuously surge into the too narrow doorway, and uncertainly descend the steps, encumbered by the marvellous showers; and while at each step they strip their burdens of their flowers, only to see them renewing themselves in their hands, they surround the ancient PRIEST, who now again stands upright, those that follow advancing in turn through the billows of blossoms that surge continually over the steps of the chapel-door.

Sister Beatrice

THE NUNS (*all together and on every hand,
while they emerge from the chapel, fill
the corridor, singing and embracing one
another amid the deluge of flowers*)

A miracle!

A miracle!

A miracle!

My father, O, my father!

I am blind!

My father, O, my father!

A miracle!

Hosanna!

O, Hosanna!

O, the Lord

Is close about us! O, the Heavens are
open!

The angels overwhelm us, and the flowers
Pursue us! Hosanna! Hosanna! Sister
Beatrice

Is holy! Ring the bell, O peal the bell,
Until the bronze be shattered! She is holy.
Ah, Sister Beatrice is holy, holy!

Sister Beatrice

SISTER REGINA

I sought to touch her holy vestments.
Then—

SISTER EGLANTINE (*crowned with flowers
more radiant than the rest*)

The flames brake forth, the shafts of
light spoke !

SISTER CLEMENCY

The angels of the altars toward us turned !

SISTER GISELA

The saints bowed over her, and joined their
hands !

SISTER EGLANTINE

And all the statues of the pillars knelt !

Sister Beatrice

SISTER FELICITY

The archangels all their wings unfurled
and sang !

SISTER GISELA (*waving heavy garlands
of roses*)

And living roses brake her bonds in twain !

SISTER BALBINA (*waving enormous stems
of lilies*)

Miraculous lilies blossomed on the rods !

SISTER FELICITY (*waving luminous
palm-branches*)

The lashes blazed into long golden palms !

THE ABBESS (*kneeling at the feet of
the PRIEST*)

My father, O my father, I have sinned.
For Sister Beatrice is holy !

Sister Beatrice

THE PRIEST (*kneeling also*)

Yea !

My daughters, yea, my daughters, I have
sinned !

Behold the ways of God past finding
out !

[*At this moment there is heard a knock on the entrance-door of the convent, and the VIRGIN, once more human of aspect, and humbly clad in the mantle and veil of BEATRICE, appears in the threshold of the chapel. She descends the steps, her eyes downcast and her hands folded together, passes among her kneeling sisters, over the flowers, which stand erect as she goes, and resuming, as if nothing had happened, the duties of her charge, she goes to the door and*

Sister Beatrice

throws it open wide. Three pilgrims enter, poor, old, and haggard, to whom she bows low, and taking from a tripod of bronze near by the aspergus and the basin of silver, she sprinkles the water over their ponderous hands in silence.

THE END OF THE SECOND ACT

ACT THE THIRD

The scene is the same. On the pedestal the image of the VIRGIN stands, as in the First Act ; the veil, mantle, and keys of SISTER BEATRICE are hanging on the grille ; the chapel-door is open, and the candles of the altar are lit ; the lamp is burning before the image, and the poor-basket overflows with clothing : in a word, all is precisely as it was at the moment when the NUN fled with PRINCE BELLIDOR, except that the entrance-door of the convent is now closed. It is early dawn in winter ; the last strokes of matins are heard, though no one rings the bell, and in the porch of the chapel the bell-rope is seen to rise and fall in empty air. Then,

Sister Beatrice

the bell having ceased to sound, a silence falls, which is broken by three blows struck slowly on the convent door. At the third blow the door moves without sound on its hinges, though no one opens it; and the two leaves are thrown wide open on the white, desolate, vacant countryside; and, amid the whirling of the snow which drives upon the threshold there advances, haggard, thin, and unrecognisable, she who was once SISTER BEATRICE. She is covered with rags; her hair, already grey, is scattered over her face, which is grievously pinched and livid. Her eyes, bruised and black, have in them only the remote and impassive gaze of those who are about to die, and hold no longer any shadow of hope. She halts a moment in the open doorway, and then, as she beholds no one, she enters, swaying, groping, and leaning on the

Sister Beatrice

doors, sweeping the corridor with her eyes, with the uneasiness of an animal long hunted. But the corridor is empty, and she takes a few more fearful steps, until, perceiving the image of the VIRGIN, she gives a cry, in which are mingled who shall say what vain and weary hopes of deliverance? — and throws herself, kneeling and fainting, at the feet of the statue.

BEATRICE

My Mother, I am here! Repulse me
not,
For you are all I have now in the world!
I hoped that I should see you once again,
And I have come too late, because my
eyes
Are closing: I no longer see you smile;
And when I stretch my hands out after
you

Sister Beatrice

I feel they are dead. I have forgotten
how

To pray, I have forgotten how to speak,
And—since I needs must tell you every-
thing—

I have wept so many tears that long ago
I lost all heart ever to cry again.

Forgive me, O forgive me, if I speak
A name that never should again be heard :
You would not recognise your daughter
else.

O see to what estate have brought her
love,

And sin, and all that men call happiness !
I left you more than twenty years ago ;
And if so be 'tis not the will of God
Men should be happy, surely then to me
He should intend no ill, for happy—O,
I have not been that ! Thus I to-day
return,

But ask for nothing, for the hour is gone,
And to receive I have no longer strength.

Sister Beatrice

I come to die here in this holy house,
If but my sisters will permit that I
Fall where I fall. O, never doubt, they
know !

The scandal of my life has been so
great

Down yonder in the town, they will have
heard . . .

But they, they know so little ; even you,
You who know all things, you will never
know

The wickedness that they have made me
do,

And all that I have suffered.

I would fain
Tell them to all, the agonies of love !

[*Looking around her.*

But why am I alone ? Lo, all the house
Is void as though my sins had emptied
it . . .

O, who has taken up the place I fled,
My place before the holy altars, who ?

Sister Beatrice

Who guards the threshold that my feet
have soiled ?

The lamp is lit: I see the tapers shine ;
Matins have rung, and here behold the
day

That grows, and none appears.

[*Perceiving the mantle and veil
that hung upon the grille.*

But what is here ?

[*She raises herself a little, draws
nearer on her knees, and feels the
veil and mantle.*

Already my poor hands are so near death
They know no longer if the things they
touch

Are things of this life or the other
world :

But is not this the mantle that I left . . .
Yesterday . . . five - and - twenty years
ago ?

[*Taking up the mantle and mechani-
cally putting it on.*

Sister Beatrice

It seems the shape—and yet seems very long.

When I was happy, when I went erect,
It fitted well enough.

[*Taking the veil.*

Now the long veil,
That now shall be my winding-sheet. O

Mother,

Forgive me if it be a sacrilege!

I am cold, I am naked; for my wretched clothes

No longer know my body how to hide,
That knows no longer where to hide itself.

Was it not you, my Mother, kept them safe,

Is it not you who give them to me now
Against the hour redoubtable, that thus
The pitiless flames that wait me may perhaps

A little hesitate and be less cruel?

[*A sound of steps and of opening doors is heard.*

Sister Beatrice

What do I hear ?

[Three strokes of the bell resound, announcing, as before, the arrival of the NUNS in the corridor.

What do I hear ? O Mother !
The door swings open, and my sisters
come !

I cannot ! Never ! O, have pity, pity !
For the walls crush me, the light suffocates,
And shame, shame, shame, is graven on
the stones

That rise up, up against me ! Ah ! Ah !
Ah !

[She falls fainting at the feet of the image. The NUNS, preceded by the ABBESS, advance along the vaulted passage, as in the preceding Act, on their way to the chapel. Many of them are very old ; and the ABBESS walks painfully, bent double,

Sister Beatrice

*supporting herself on a staff.
Scarcely have they entered but
they perceive BEATRICE lying
motionless across the corridor ;
they run to her and crowd
about her, uneasy, frightened,
and dismayed.*

THE ABBESS (*who first sees her*)

O, Sister Beatrice is dead !

SISTER CLEMENCY

The Heavens

Gave her, the Lord has taken her away !

SISTER FELICITY

Her crown was ready, and the angels called.

SISTER EGLANTINE (*raising and support-
ing the head of Sister Beatrice,
which she kisses with a kind of pious
awe*)

No, no, she is not dead : she shudders,
breathes !

Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS

But look, how pale she is ! But see, how thin !

SISTER CLEMENCY

As though one night had aged her ten long years !

SISTER FELICITY

She must have suffered, striving, till the dawn !

SISTER CLEMENCY

And all alone against the angelic host
That sought to draw her hence !

SISTER EGLANTINE

She suffered much
Already yesternight ; she trembled, wept,
Who, ever since the miracle of flowers,
Nursed in her eyes that smile miraculous.
She would not have me take her place ;
she said .

Sister Beatrice

"I wait," she said, "until my saint returns."

SISTER BALBINA

What saint?

[*The ABBESS, raising her eyes at hazard, sees the image of the VIRGIN re-established in the pedestal. The NUNS raise their heads, and, with the exception of SISTER EGLANTINE, who continues to hold the fainting form of BEATRICE in her arms, they all turn with cries of ecstasy and throw themselves on their knees at the foot of the pedestal.*

THE NUNS

The Virgin has returned ! Our Lady !
Our Mother is saved ! And she has all
her jewels !
Her crown is brighter, and her eyes more
deep,

Sister Beatrice

And sweeter her regard ! She has come
back
From Heaven, and brought Heaven back
again to us !
Yea, on the wings of her most holy
prayers . . .

SISTER EGLANTINE

Come, come ! I hear her heart no longer !
Come !

[*The Nuns turn and once more crowd about BEATRICE.*

SISTER CLEMENCY (*kneeling near her*)

Ah, Sister Beatrice, you shall not leave
Your sisters on this high miraculous day !

SISTER FELICITY

The Virgin smiles on you ; her lips appeal !

SISTER EGLANTINE

Alas, she cannot hear ! She seems to suffer ;
Her face grows hollow—

Sister Beatrice

SISTER CLEMENCY

Bear her to her bed.

Come, let us bear her yonder to her cell.

SISTER EGLANTINE

No : let us rather leave her nigh to Her
Who loves and fences her with miracles.

[*The Nuns enter the cell, returning
with cloaks and linen sheets,
on which they lay BEATRICE
at the feet of the statue.*

SISTER CLEMENCY

She cannot breathe—undo her veil and
mantle.

[*She does as she advises, and the
Nuns behold BEATRICE covered
with rags.*

SISTER FELICITY

My Mother, have you seen her dripping
rags ?

SISTER BALBINA

O, she is quite benumbed with melting snow !

Sister Beatrice

SISTER CLEMENCY

We never knew her hair had grown so white.

SISTER FELICITY

Her naked feet are soiled with wayside mire !

THE ABBESS

Hold we our peace, my daughters ; for we live

Near heaven ; the hands that touch her will remain

Luminous.

SISTER EGLANTINE

See, her breast is heaving ! See !

Her eyes are going to open !

[BEATRICE opens her eyes, moves her head a little, and gazes about her.]

BEATRICE (as though emerging from a dream, and still bewildered, in a remote voice)

When they died—

Sister Beatrice

My children—when they died. . . . Why
do you smile?
They died of want.

THE ABBESS

We do not smile; we are glad,
Ay, glad to see you coming back to life.

BEATRICE

I, coming back to life!

[*Looking about her with advancing
recognition.*

Yes, I remember,
I came here in the depth of my distress.
Look on me not so fearfully: I no more
Shall be the butt of scandal: you shall now
Have all your will of me. No, none
shall know,
If you should fear that any should ever
tell—
I shall say nothing. I submit to all,
For they have broken all my body and
soul.

Sister Beatrice

I know it cannot be allowed that I,
Here in this place, and at the Virgin's feet,
So near the chapel, and so near to all
That holy is and pure, should die. You
are all,

O, very good ; you have been patient ;
yes ;

You have not cast me out of doors at once.
But if you may, if God allow it too,
O, do not cast me forth too far from here !
There is no need that any tend me now,
No need that any me commiserate,
Though I am very sick, I suffer now
No more, no more. . . . Why have you
laid me here,

On these fair sheets of white ? Alas !
white sheets

Are nothing to me now but a reproach,
And straw polluted is the fitting bed
Of dying sin. But you still look at me,
And still say nothing. And you do not
look

Sister Beatrice

Angry. I see tears in your eyes. I think
You do not know me yet.

THE ABBESS (*kissing her hands*)

But yes, yes, yes !
Surely we know you, surely—you, our
saint !

BEATRICE (*snatching away her hands in a kind of terror*)

Kiss not these hands—they have done so
much ill !

SISTER CLEMENCY (*kissing her feet*) O soul elect come down to us from heaven !

BEATRICE

Kiss not these feet that used to run to sin !

SISTER EGLANTINE (*kissing her forehead*) I kiss this pure brow, crowned with miracles.

Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE (*hiding her face in her hands*)

What would you all? What has befallen?

Once,

When I was happy, one was never
pardoned;

Kiss not this brow: it has been friends
with lust!

But you that touched it, tell me who
you are?

I am not certain if my weary eyes
Betray me; but if they see yonder still,
You are Sister Eglantine.

SISTER EGLANTINE

Yes, I am she.

That Sister Eglantine whom you have
loved.

BEATRICE

You, five-and-twenty years ago, I told
I was unhappy.

Sister Beatrice

SISTER EGLANTINE

Five-and-twenty years
Since, among all our sisters, God chose
you.

BEATRICE

You tell me that, and no least bitterness
Lurks in your voice. What has befallen
me

I cannot fathom. I am weak and ill,
And cannot recollect—and every word
Astounds me. I was inattentive. See,
I think that you deceive yourselves. I
am—

Cover your faces, make the holy sign!—
I am Sister Beatrice!

THE ABBESS

But yes, we know!
Our Sister Beatrice, our sister, ours,
Purest among us, the miraculous lamb,
Godchild of angels, the immaculate flame!

Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE

Ah, is it truly you? I did not know.
Mother, you used to go so upright; now
How you do stoop! I have also learned
to stoop,
And now behold me fallen. Yes, I know
All of you: there is Sister Clemency.

SISTER CLEMENCY (*bending her head
and smiling*)

Yes, yes.

BEATRICE

Sister Felicity.

SISTER FELICITY (*smiling*)

It is.

Sister Felicity who came the first
Out of the blossoming chapel.

BEATRICE

And I think

You have not suffered, for you seem not
sad.

I was the younger: I am the elder now.

Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS

That is no doubt because of love divine
Being a terrible burden.

BEATRICE

Mother, no.
It is the love of man that is the burden,
The weary burden. You do pardon me,
You also pardon me?

THE ABBESS (*kneeling at BEATRICE's feet*)

O daughter mine,
If any have need of pardon, it is she
Who can at last prostrate herself before
Your feet.

BEATRICE

But do you know what I have done?

THE ABBESS

You have done naught but miracle, have
been,

Sister Beatrice

Since the great day of flowers, our soul's
light,
The incense of our prayers, and the source
Of grace, the gate of marvels !

BEATRICE

But I fled
One night, now five-and-twenty years ago,
With the Prince Bellidor.

THE ABBESS

Of whom do you speak,
Of whom do you speak, my daughter ?

BEATRICE

Of myself !
I say myself ! You will not understand ?
One evening, five-and-twenty years ago,
I fled, and when three months were at an
end
He did not love me. Then I lost all
shame,
I lost all reason, and I lost all hope.

Sister Beatrice

All men by turns this body have profaned,
This clay to its God unfaithful. And I
 took

Pleasure in this, and called men after me.
I fell so low that Heaven's angels thence
Could not have risen for all their mighty
 wings.

So many crimes I have committed, I
Have often even sin itself defiled !

THE ABBESS (*gently placing her hand on
BEATRICE's lips*)

Daughter, the Shadow tempts you ; speak
no more,
For rising anguish robs you of yourself.

SISTER CLEMENCY

She is worn out with miracle.

SISTER FELICITY

And grace

Confounds her.

Sister Beatrice

SISTER EGLANTINE

'The air of heaven weighs her down.

BEATRICE (*who struggles, pushes away the hand of the Abbess and sits up*)

I do not wander ! No, I tell you, no !
This is no air of heaven, but of earth,
And this is truth ! Ah, you are all too
mild !

You are too soft and imperturbable !
. And you know nothing ! I would rather
far

You should afflict me, but should learn at
last !

O, you live here and do your penances,
And say your prayers, and seek to expiate
sin,

But look you, it is I, and all my kind,
Who live beyond the pale and have no
rest,

That do the bitterest penance to the end !

Sister Beatrice

ABBESSION

Pray, pray, my sisters ; now the final trial !

SISTER ECLANTINE

The triumph of the angels irks the Fiend !

BEATRICE

Yes, yes, it is the Fiend, the Fiend prevails !
See you these hands ? They have a human
shape

No longer ; see, they cannot open now.
I had to sell them after soul and body.
They buy hands also when no more is left.

THE ABBESS (*wiping the sweat from
BEATRICE's face*)

May Heaven's angels, who about thy
couch
Now watch thee, deign before thy stream-
ing face
To spread their wings !

Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE

' Ah! Heaven's angels! Ah!
Where are they, tell me, and what do
they do?

Have I not told you? Why, I have not now
My children, for the three most lovely died
When I no more was lovely, and the last,
Lest it should suffer, being one night mad,
I killed. And there were others never born,
Although they cried for birth. And still
the sun
Shone, and the stars returned, and justice
slept,
And only the most evil were happy and
proud.

THE ABBESS

The strife is terrible about great saints.

SISTER EGLANTINE

It is at Heaven's gates the infernal fire
Wastes the huge angers of its futile rage

Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE (*falling back exhausted*)

I eat no more—I stifle—what you will
Be done to me. I had to tell you all.

SISTER EGLANTINE

The archangels bear her forth.

SISTER FELICITY

The phalanxes

Of the celestial host have brought back
peace.

THE ABBESS

The evil dream has fled. Now smile
again,

My poor and holy sister, while you think
On all the blasphemies you did not speak.
A baneful voice usurping on your lips
Exhaled them in the rage of final loss

BEATRICE

It was my voice.

Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS

My good and holy sister,
Assure your heart, and have you no regrets.
For that was not the voice that all we
know,
The dear and gentle voice, the angel's pilot,
The health of sickness, that so many years
Quickened our prayers

SISTER EGLANTINE

Fear nothing, sister; nay,
In the last conflict you shall never lose
The palm and diadem of a life of love,
And innocence, and prayer.

BEATRICE

Never one hour
Since that unhappy hour, in all my life,
There never was an hour that was not
marked
By mortal sin.

Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS

My daughter, pray to God !
You are most holy ; yet the enemy
Tempts you, and scruples lead your sense
astray.

How should you have committed all these
sins

So dreadful ? It is nigh on thirty years
You have been here, of threshold and of
altar

Most humble servitor : my very eyes
Have followed you in all your deeds and
prayers,

And I can answer before God for them
As I would for my own. But would to
Heaven

That mine were like to yours ! It is not
here,

Within these cloisters, but without, beyond,
Out in the world estrayed, that sin
* triumphs :

Sister Beatrice

And of that world, all thanks to God, 'you
know

Nothing, for never have you issued forth
Out of the shadow of the sanctuary.

BEATRICE

Never gone forth? O, I can think no
more!

It was too long, so long, too long ago!
I am near death; but you should tell me
truth;

Is it that you forgive me, or deceive,
Unwilling I should know it?

THE ABBESS

None deceives,
None pardons. We have seen you every
day

Before the altar punctual, to our hours
Attentive, and to all the humble cares
Of alms and of the threshold.

Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE

I am here,
My Mother, and I do not think I dream.
Look at this hand : I tear it with my nails ;
See, the blood shows and flows ; the blood
is real.

I have no other proofs. So tell me now,
If you have pity, here, in face of God,
For we are close to God when people die,—
If you do wish it, I will say no more,
But if you can for pity tell me, now,
What did you say, and what it was you
did

When five-and-twenty years ago you
found

One morning that the door was opened
wide,

The corridor deserted—when you found
The altar abandoned—when you found
the veil,

The veil and mantle ? . . . Mother, I can
no more.

Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS

Daughter, this memory, I understand,
Must trouble you and overwhelm you
still,

Though five-and-twenty years ago befell
The wondrous miracle whereby your God
Elected you. The Virgin left us then,
To mount again to heaven; ere she went
Investing you with her most holy robe
And sacred ornaments, and lastly crowned
You with her golden crown, to teach us
so

In boundless mercy that while she was
gone
You took her place.

BEATRICE

But who then took my place?

THE ABBESS

Why, no one took it, since you still were
there.

Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE

There, every day? I was among you all?
I moved, I spoke, you touched me with
your hands?

THE ABBESS

As now, my child, I touch you with my
hand.

BEATRICE

Mother, I know no more; except I think
I have no longer strength to understand.
I am still submissive, and I ask you naught.
I feel that all are very good: I feel
That death is very gentle.

Is it you
Who understand the soul is wretched—
you?

There was no pardon here when here I
lived.

I have said often, when I was not happy,
God would not punish if He once knew all.
But you are happy, and have learned it all.

Sister Beatrice

In other days all folk ignored distress,
In other days they cursed all those that
sinned ;

But now all pardon, and all seem to
know . . .

One of the angels, one would almost say,
Had spoken out the truth. Mother, and
you,

My Sister Eglantine, give me your hands—
You are not angry with me ? Tell them all,
My sisters . . . what is it they should be
told ?

My eyes no longer open, and my lips
Stiffen. . . . At last I fall asleep. I have
lived

In a world wherein I knew not what de-
sired

Hate and ill-will, and in another world
I die, and understand not what desire,
Nor whereat aim mercy and love.

[She falls back exhausted among the
sheets. Silence.

Sister Beatrice

SISTER EGLANTINE

She sleeps.

THE ABBESS

Pray, pray, my sisters, till the triumphant
hour!

[*The Nuns fall on their knees around
the bed of BEATRICE.*

THE END OF SISTER BEATRICE

ARDIANE AND BARBE BLEUE

OR,

THE USELESS DELIVERANCE.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

ARDIANE

SELYSETTE

MELISANDE

YGRAINE

BELLANGERE

ALLADINE

A NURSE (foster-mother to ARDIANE)

BARBE BLEUE

Peasants, the Crowd.

ARDIANE AND BARBE BLEUE

ACT THE FIRST

A vast, resplendent hall, of semi-circular form, in the castle of BARBE BLEUE.

At the remoter end, in the centre of the semi-circular wall, is an enormous door ; on either hand of this are three smaller doors, of ebony, with locks and ornaments of silver ; each door is set within a niche, and all these niches are enclosed by a semi-circular colonnade of marble, the pillars of which support the balcony overhead. Above these doors, but set further back, are six great windows, to which the aforesaid balcony gives access ; these may be gained

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

from either side of the hall, by two flights of stairs, which follow the curve of the walls, and lead up to the semi-circular gallery.

It is evening ; the great windows are open, and the candelabra lit. Without, below the windows, is an invisible, excited crowd, whose cries, now uneasy, now terrified, now threatening, together with the sound of sudden movements, the trampling of feet, and the murmur of persons speaking, are heard with great distinctness. During the first bars of the overture the curtain rises, and the voices of the hidden crowd are at once heard above the music. .

VOICES IN THE CROWD

So . . . she was in the chariot ? Did you see ?

*All the village lingered there,
There, to see her. . . . Is she fair ?*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

She looked at me. . . . And me. . . And me.
O miserable child! . . . Yet all the while
She seemed to smile.

Whence hath she come? . . . From very
far away,
To know not . . . what awaits her here
to-day.

Their journey hath endured for thrice
ten days. . .

He cannot see us. . . shout, that he may
know. . . .

[*All together.*]

Back! Back! . . Advance no nearer!
Never go
Up to the castle! . . It is death, death, .
death!

[*Isolated voices.*]

She does not understand. . . I hear they
say

No less than twenty men pursued her way,
That dwelt about her home. . . You
wonder why?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Because they loved her. . . . Many used to
cry

Along the roads. . . . Why has she come,
O why?

They tell me that she knew. . . . He shall
not have her, no!

She is too fair for you! . . . He shall
not have her, no! . . .

O see them, see them, there they go!

Where are they going? . . . They are
coming through,

By the red gate. . . . It is not true . . .
I see their torches in the avenue!

There the great chariot goes between the
trees!

He is afraid. . . . He shall not have her, no!
He is mad, mad, mad! He is mad! * He
has done enough!

It is too much! . . . So she will be the
sixth!

O murderer, butcher! . . . Death to the
butcher, death!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Fire, fire! . . . Bring fire! . . . I have
brought my hay-fork, see!

And I my scythe!—They are entering
the yard . . .

Hey, let me see! . . . Take care! . . .
The gates are barred!

Wait for them here. . . . They say she
knows it all!

What does she know? . . . She knows
what I know too. . . .

What do you know? . . . I know they
all are dead!

Not dead, not dead? . . . I buried them
myself!

But I one evening once as I went by
Heard singing voices. . . . So did I. . . .
And I . . .

Ay, they come back, they say. . . . But he
Brings down misfortune on our heads. . . .

O see,
The windows! . . . They are closing of
themselves!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Now . . . they are going in ! They are
going in . . .

Nothing to see ! . . . Death to him !
Death ! Death ! Death !

[And at this moment the six great windows above the interior balcony close of their own motion, stifling little by little the voices of the crowd. Soon nothing is heard but an indefinite murmur which is almost silence. Shortly afterwards ARDIANE and the NURSE enter by a side door.

THE NURSE

Where are we ? . . . Listen ! . . . Ah ! : . .
that muttering there !

It is the peasants : they were eager, yes,
To save us : yes, they ran along the roads,
But never dared to speak : they made us
signs,

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

They made us signs that meant we should return. . . .

[*She goes forward to the great door at the end of the hall.*

They are here, behind this door! . . . I hear them: some

Tramp to and fro. . . . Now let us try to flee. . . .

He leaves us here alone: we can escape, Perhaps. . . . I tell you plainly, he is mad!

O, it is death! For all they say is true, He has killed five women. . . .

ARDIANE

No, they are not dead. . . .

Yonder I heard it spoken of at times, In the far place whereto his savage love, That yet was tremulous, came to seek me out,

* As of a thing incomprehensible.

I was suspicious of the truth, and here

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Am sure. He loves me : I am beautiful :
So shall I learn his secret. But ere all
We must be insubordinate. When the
future

Is threatening to us and inscrutable
That is ere all our duty. For the rest,
They were mistaken ; and if they are
lost

They were lost by hesitation.

Here are we,
Within the outer hall whence opens out
The chamber where his love awaits me.

Here
Are keys he gave me of the treasure-
chests
Of bridal raiment, and the silver keys
Are ours to use : the golden is forbid.
That is the only one of import. These,
The six, I cast away : the last I keep.

*[She throws away the keys of silver,
which tinkle and ring on the
marble flags.]*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE (*who hastily picks them up again*)

What are you doing ? He has given you
The treasures, all the treasures that they
open !

ARDIANE

Open them you, then, if it give you
pleasure ;
For me, I seek for the forbidden door.
Open the others if you will ; but all
That is permitted us will tell us nought.

THE NURSE (*looking at the keys and then about the hall*)

The doors are yonder, set within the
marble,
And we may know, since all have locks of
silver,
They answer to the keys : but first of all,
Which one shall I unclose ?

. . . Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

What matter which?
They are but there to turn aside our
minds
From that we need to know. . . . I do
not find,
Although I seek for it, the seventh
door. . . .

THE NURSE (*trying the lock of the
first door*)

Is this the key of the first? . . . Or this?
. . . Or this?
Not yet, not yet. . . . Ay, but the third
goes in,
Dragging my fingers after it! . . . Be-
ware! . . .
Fly! . . . The two panels both have
come to life!
They are gliding back like curtains! . . .
What is this?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

'Beware, beware! . . . It is a hail of fire,
That beats upon my hands, that wounds
my face!

O!

[*The NURSE springs backward, for while she is speaking the two leaves of the door glide of their own motion into lateral recesses, and suddenly disappear, disclosing a vast heap of amethysts piled up to the top of the doorway. Then, as though delivered suddenly from centuries of constraint, countless gems and jewels of every size and form, but all of the one substance, amethyst—necklaces, bracelets, rings, aigrettes, buckles, girdles, collars, diadems—fall like a crumbling mass of violet flames, and rebound as far as the further side of the*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

hall ; and, while the first to fall spread themselves over the marble flags, others, more and more numerous and more and more resplendent, begin to fall from all the mouldings of the enchanted vaultings, and flow therefrom continually with an incessant sound of living jewels.

THE NURSE (*fascinated, bewildered, gathering up jewels with both her hands*)

Gather them up, O stoop, gather them up !

Take the most beautiful ! Enough are here

To glorify a kingdom ! Still they fall !

They pierce my hair, they stone my hands !
O look !

Unheard-of gems are raining from the vaults,

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Miraculous violets, purple, lilac, mauve !
Plunge your arms into them and hide your
face,
And I will fill my mantle full with them !

ARDIANE

These amethysts are noble. Open now
The second door.

THE NURSE

The second ? I dare not ! . . .
Yet I would know if . . .

[She inserts the key in the lock of the
second door.

O, beware, beware !
The key already turns ! And they have
wings,
The doors : the walls too tear themselves
asunder !

O !

[The scene is the same as on the
opening of the first door, but

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

this time is seen the accumulated wealth, the rebounding irruption, the dazzling and musical fall of a blue rain of sapphires.

ARDIANE

These are fine sapphires. Open now the third.

THE NURSE

Wait, wait until I see that I have here
* Indeed the most magnificent. My cloak
Will break beneath the weight of blue,
blue sky !

O see them overflow ! on every hand
They pour, pour, pour !—a violet torrent
here,
And yonder in a stream of azure blue !

ARDIANE

Come, come, Nurse, quickly, for the
chance to sin
Is rare and fugitive. . . .

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE (*opens the third door, when the same thing befalls, save that this time follows the pale invasion, the milky rush, of a deluge of pearls, a shower less heavy, but more illimitable than those preceding*)

I will but take
A handful of them, so they may caress
The sapphires.

ARDIANE

Open now the fourth door.

THE NURSE (*opens the fourth door, when as before there is a shower of jewels, but this time of emeralds*)

O, these are greener than the Spring that runs
Along the poplars thick with drops of dew

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

That catch the lovely sunlight in my
home!

[*Shaking her mantle, which over-flows with amethysts, sapphires, and pearls.*

Away, away, ye others! give you place
For the most beautiful—for I was
born

Under the boughs, and love the light of
leaves.

ARDIANE

Open the fifth door.

THE NURSE

O, not even these?
You do not love them?

ARDIANE

What I love is fair
Beyond all fairness of miraculous gems.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE (*opening the fifth door, to set free a blinding irruption, a living incandescence, a sinister deluge and cascade of rubies*)

O, these are terrible : I will not touch !

ARDIANE

Now we approach the end : the threat lies here.

Open the sixth.

THE NURSE

It is the last key.

ARDIANE

Open it quickly.

[*The NURSE, hesitating, opens the sixth door. All passes as before : but the radiance is this time intolerable. Cataracts of enormous diamonds of the first,*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*water pour into the hall; myriads
of sparks, flashes, flecks of fire,
and prismatic rays mingle, are
extinguished, blaze forth again
and multiply, outspreading as
they fall.* ARDIANE, startled,
gives a dazed cry. She stoops,
picks up a diadem, a necklace,
and handfuls of the glistening
splendour, and therewith she
decks at random her hair, her
arms, her throat, her hands.
*Then, flashing before her eyes
and raising before her face
diamonds that shed a brilliance
upon her.*

O, my flashing diamonds !

For you I never sought, but on my way
I greet you ! O immortal dew of light !
Stream o'er my hands, illuminate my arms,
Dazzle my very flesh ! O, you are pure,
And you are tireless, and you never die :

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

And that which in your fires eternally
Trembles, like to a populace of spirits,
That have constrained and wear the stars
of Heaven,

It is the passion of that Radiance
Which, penetrating all things, knows no
rest,

And finds no more to conquer, save itself !

[*She approaches the door, and looks
up at the vaulted arch.*

Rain on, O supreme heart of summer,
rain !

O shards of light, O limitless soul of flame !
Yea, wound my eyes, yet shall you never
tire

Those eyes of gazing !

[*Leaning yet further back.*

O, what is it there ?

O Nurse, where are you ? For the
splendid rain

Hangs motionless, suspended in a bow.

A diamond rainbow of prismatic fire !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

O see the seventh door, with golden bars,
With golden lock and hinges !

THE NURSE

Come away !
No, never touch it ! No, withdraw your
hands !
Withdraw your eyes, lest of itself it open !
Come, let us hide ! These diamonds—
after them
Or fire will come, or death !

ARDIANE

Go back, go back !
Hide you yourself behind a marble shaft :
I will alone go forward.

[She steps into the recess under the vaulted doorway, and inserts the key in the lock. The door divides into two panels, and disappears : nothing is visible

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

save an opening full of darkness : but the sound of singing, muffled and remote, rises from the depths of the earth, and spreads through the hall.

THE NURSE

Ardiane !

What are you doing ? Is it you that sings ?

ARDIANE

Listen !

THE DISTANT VOICES

Orlamonde's five daughters,
When the faery died,
Orlamonde's five daughters
Sought to win outside.

THE NURSE

They are . . . the other women !

ARDIANE

Yes.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE

O, shut the door ! Their singing fills
the hall :
It will be heard, heard everywhere !

ARDIANE (*trying to close the door*)

I cannot !

THE DISTANT VOICES

They lit their five lanterns,
Through all the towers they sought,
And in four hundred chambers ;
The day, they found it not.

THE NURSE

Now it is louder, always louder ! Come !
Come, let us close—help me—the outer
door. . . .

[*They try to close the door that concealed the diamonds.*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

This too resists ! We cannot shut them
in !

THE DISTANT VOICES

Then they found an echoing deep,
And let it them enfold :
And upon a stubborn door
Found a key of gold.

THE NURSE (*bewildered, and also entering
the recess*)

Be silent, silent ! . . . We shall all be
lost !

Stifle that voice !

[Stretching out her mantle.
The doorway—ah, my cloak

Will cover it. . . .

ARDIANE

I see beyond the sill
Steps. I am going down to where they
sing.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE DISTANT VOICES (*always louder*).

Through the chinks they see the ocean :

 Ah, they fear to die !

They strike the door they dare not open,

 And the hours go by.

[*At the last words of the song BARBE BLEUE enters the hall. For a moment he stops short, gazing ; then he draws near to the women.*

BARBE BLEUE.

You too !

ARDIANE (*who starts, leaves the doorway, and advances, glittering with diamonds, towards BARBE BLEUE*)

I above all.

BARBE BLEUE

I thought that you
Were stronger, wiser than your sisters were.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

How long did they avoid the thing forbid?

BARBE BLEUE

This, for some days; that, a few months;

and one,

The last of all, a year.

ARDIANE

It was the last,

Only the last, that there was need to punish.

BARBE BLEUE

It was a very little thing to ask.

ARDIANE

You asked of these more than you ever

gave.

BARBE BLEUE

The happiness I willed for you you lose.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

The happiness I would lives not in darkness.

When I know all to pardon will be mine.

BARBE BLEUE (*seizing ARDIANE by the arm*)

Come! Come!

ARDIANE

Where would you, then, that I should go?

BARBE BLEUE

Where I shall lead you.

ARDIANE

No.

[*BARBE BLEUE strives to drag her away by force. She gives a long cry of pain. This cry is answered at first by a low*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

murmur from without. The struggle between the two continues for a few moments, and the NURSE gives vent to despairing outcries. Suddenly a stone, hurled from without, shatters one of the windows, and the crowd is heard, excited and enraged. Other stones fall; the NURSE, running to the great door at the end of the hall, raises the bars and shoots the bolts. A sudden rush from outside splinters the door and forces it in; and the peasants, infuriated but hesitating, crowd upon the threshold. BARBE BLEUE, releasing ARDIANE, draws his sword and prepares for the onset. But ARDIANE, tranquil, advances towards the crowd.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

What would you? He has not done me any ill.

[She gently disperses the peasants, and carefully closes the door, while BARBE BLEUE, with lowered eyes, gazes at the point of his sword.]

CURTAIN

ACT THE SECOND

At the rising of the curtain the scene is a vast subterranean hall, with a vaulted roof supported by many columns ; it is plunged in almost total darkness. From the extreme right, almost in the wings, there runs back a narrow, winding subterranean passage, also with a vaulted roof ; it debouches into the great hall towards the front of the stage by a roughly-arched opening.

At the further end of this passage ARDIANE and the NURSE are seen, descending the last few steps of a stairway ; ARDIANE carries a lamp.

THE NURSE

Hush ! Do you hear ? He shuts the iron door

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Over our heads ! Why would you not
give way ?
We never shall behold the day again.

ARDIANE

Fear not ; he is wounded, he is overcome ;
But knows it not as yet. With supplication
He will re-open it : but let us seek
First if we cannot of ourselves win free.
Meanwhile his wrath all that his love
refused

Has granted : we shall find what here is hid.

*[She advances, holding the lamp high
above her head, to the mouth
of the passage, and there bends
forward, seeking to penetrate
the darkness of the hall. At
the first ray of light which
pierces the obscurity is heard
the sound of hushed and fearful
flight. ARDIANE turns towards
the NURSE to call her.]*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Come! They are here!

[She enters the hall which the lamp
illuminates pillar by pillar.

Where are you?

[A terrified moan replies. ARDIANE
directs the rays of her lamp
toward the part from which it
seems to proceed, and perceives
the forms of five women,
motionless with fright, who are
huddled together in the shadows,
of the remotest pillars.

ARDIANE (in a muffled voice, still
half fearful)

They are there!

Nurse, nurse, where are you?

[The Nurse hastens toward
ARDIANE: ARDIANE gives her

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

the lamp, and takes a few hesitating steps toward the five.

Sisters, O my sisters!

[*The five start.*

They live! They live! They live! Behold me here!

[*She runs to them with open arms, clasps them with hesitating hands, strains them to her breast, and kisses them and caresses them, feeling about her with uncertain gestures, in a kind of impassioned and convulsive tenderness, while the NURSE, lamp in hand, stands still a little apart.*

ARDIANE

O, I have you! . . . They are full of life,
They are full of sweetness! . . . When
I saw the hall

Open in darkness from the passage end,

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

I thought to find . . . ah me! . . . dead
bodies here. . . .

And lo . . . I kiss these loveliest lips in
tears!

Have you not suffered? O, your lips
how fresh,

Your cheeks how like the cheeks of
children! See,

Your naked arms are supple, ay, and
warm;

Your round round breasts are throbbing
through their veils!

Why do you tremble? . . . O, how
many you are!

Now I clasp shoulders; now my arms
entwine

Hips, and my touch on whom I know
not rests. . . .

On every hand my lips meet lips, my
breast meets breasts.

O this that bathes you all, this hair!
You must be fair, so fair!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Waves, faintly warm, are parted by my,
hands,

My arms are lost amid rebellious strands. . . .

Have you a thousand tresses? . . . and
are they

Like night, or like the day?

I see no longer what I do,

But I am kissing, kissing all of you,

And one by one I gather all your hands!

It is the least of you I find the last:

O never tremble! See, I hold you fast,

My arms enfold you close to me!

Nurse, nurse, what are you doing there?

Behold me like a mother here,

Feeling in darkness, and my children . . .

they

Await the dawn to clear.

[*The NURSE draws near, bearing the
lamp, and its light falls on the
group of women. The captives
are then seen to be clad in rags,
their hair in disorder, their*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*faces emaciated and their eyes
dazzled and alarmed. ARDI-
ANE, for a moment astonished,
takes the lamp from the NURSE,
in order the better to light them,
and to regard them more
closely.*

ARDIANE

O, you have suffered here !
And O, how gloomy does your prison
"seem !"
Great clammy drops are falling on my
hands,
And my lamp's flame is flickering all the
while !
How strange your eyes are when you look
at me !
And you draw back as I approach—but
why ?
What, are you still afraid ?
And who is that who seeks to fly ?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Is it not she, the youngest of you all,
She that I kissed but now?
O, has my long long sister's kiss
Done to you any harm?
Come to me, come then! Do you fear
the light?
Tell me, what is her name?

TWO OR THREE TIMID VOICES

Selysette.

ARDIANE

Selysette—a smile?
It is the first that I have seen this while!
Your wide eyes falter as though they saw
the Dead,
Although in truth they look on life in-
stead:
And O, these delicate bare arms that
tremble,
Both waiting to be loved! Come, my arms
too

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Are waiting, though I tremble not as you !

[Embracing her.

You have been in this tomb how many days ?

SELYSETTE

We count the days but ill here, oftentimes Deceive ourselves, but none the less I think I have been here for upwards of a year.

[YGRAINE advances : she is paler than the others.

ARDIANE

It is a long while since you saw the light !

YGRAINE

I used not to unclose my eyes ; I wept So long alone.

SELYSETTE (*looking fixedly at ARDIANE*)

How beautiful you are !

How could he bring himself to punish you As he used us ? You also in the end Have disobeyed him ?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

No, it was not so !

No, I obeyed more swiftly than the rest,
But other laws than his.

SELYSETTE

Why have you come ?

O why have you come here ?

ARDIANE

To set you free.

SELYSETTE

How should we be set free ?

ARDIANE

But follow me :

No more than that. . . . What used you
here to do ?

SELYSETTE

We prayed, sang, wept, and then we waited
always.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

You never sought escape?

SELYSETTE

We could not flee,
For all the ways are shut, and flight forbid.

ARDIANE

That we shall see. . . . But she that looks
at me

Between the tangles of her fallen hair
That seems to wrap her round in frozen
flame—

What is her name?

SELYSETTE

Her name is Melisande.

ARDIANE

Come hither, Melisande! And she whose
eyes,

Wide, eager eyes, are following my lamp?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

Bellangere.

ARDIANE

And that other, who is hid
Behind the heavy pillar?

SELYSETTE

She has come
From very far away, poor Alladine!

ARDIANE

Why do you call her poor?

SELYSETTE

Because she came
Last of us all, and speaks another tongue.

ARDIANE (*holding out her arms to
ALLADINE*)

Come, Alladine! . . . You see that I speak
hers,
When I embrace her thus.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE.

She has not yet
Ever ceased weeping.

ARDIANE (*looking at SELYSETTE and the others with astonishment*)

Why, but you yourself,
Can you not laugh yet—laugh and clap
your hands?

And all the rest are silent ! What is this ?
What are you ? Will you live in terror
thus

Always ? I do not see you smile at all,
While with your eyes—incredulous eyes !
—you watch

My every gesture. Will you not believe
The joyful news ? O, do you not regret
The light of day, the birds among the
boughs,

The high green gardens blowing over-
head ?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Do you not know the world is in the
Spring? *

I yester-morning, wandering by the way,
Drank in the light, the sense of space of
dawn,

So many flowers beneath my every step,
I knew not where to set my careless feet!
Have you forgot the sunlight and the
dew,

Dew in the leaves, and laughter of the
sea?

The sea but now was laughing as it laughs
On days whereon it knows the wind of
joy,

And all its thousand ripples approved my
feet,

Its ripples singing on the sands of light. . . .

*[At this moment one of the drops of
water which drip incessantly
from the roof falls upon the
flame of the lamp which ARDI-
ANE holds before her, as she*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

turns towards the mouth of the subterranean passage, and the light flickers and is extinguished. The NURSE gives a cry of terror, and ARDIANE stops, dismayed.

ARDIANE (*in the darkness*)

O, but where are you?

SELYSETTE

Hither: take my hand.
Stay by me: water, stagnant and profound,
Lies yonder.

ARDIANE

What, and you can see it still?

SELYSETTE

Yes, we have lived so long in darkness here.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

BELLANGERE

Come hither: it is lighter here by far.

SELYSETTE

Yes, let us all go thither to the light.

ARDIANE

Then is there in this deepest darkness
light?

SELYSETTE

Yes, there is light. Do you not see it
there,
A wide, pale glow illuminining the depth
Beyond the further arches?

ARDIANE

Where?

SELYSETTE

O blind!

O, let me kiss you. . . .

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Yes, there is indeed
A faint light, growing wider. . .

SELYSETTE

O no, no !
It is your eyes, your lovely astonished eyes
That widen !

ARDIANE

O, whence is it ?

MELISANDE

We do not know.

ARDIANE

But we must know !

[She goes toward the back of the scene,
and moves to and fro, feeling
along the wall with her hands.

Here is the wall . . . and here . . .
But higher . . . here . . . it is no longer
stone !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Help me to mount upon this mass of rock !

[*She climbs, supported by the others.*

Here it is like an altar. Here the roof
Is moulded in a pointed arch. . . . And
here—

O, O, enormous bolts and iron bars !
You have sought to push them ? Have
you ?

SELYSETTE

Never ! No !

No, never touch them : for they say the
sea

Washes the walls — great waves will
tumble in !

It is the sea that makes it glimmer
green !

YGRAINE

We have so often heard it : have a
care !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

O, I see water tremble above our heads !

ARDIANE

No, no, it is the light that seeks you out !

BELLANGERE

She is trying to force it open !

[*The terrified women recoil, and take refuge behind a great column, whence they follow with widened eyes ARDIANE's every movement.*

ARDIANE

My poor sisters !

Why, if you love your darkness, do you seek

Deliverance from any quarter ? Why,
If you were happy, did you use to weep ?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

O, the bars rise ! They rise ! And now
the doors
Are going to open ! Wait !

[And indeed the heavy panels of a sort of great interior shutter are seen, while yet she is speaking, to open, but as yet only a very faint, diffused, and sombre light illuminates the round aperture perceived under the vaulted ceiling.

ARDIANE (*continuing her search*)

No light as yet,
No real light ! But now I pass
My hands across. . . . What is it ?
Glass ?
Or maybe marble. . . . One would say
This were a window, sealed away,
Blackened with pitch. . . . My nails are
broken ! Nay,
Where are your distaffs ? **Mélisande**,

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Selysette, give me in my hand
A distaff: nay, a stone,
A single pebble of the thousands strown
Over the floor. . . .

[*SELYSETTE runs to ARDIANE, holding up to her a stone, which she takes.*

Behold before your eyes
The key of your sunrise!

[*She strikes a violent blow upon the glass. One of the square panes is shattered into fragments, and a great dazzling star seems to burst forth in the darkness. The women give a cry of almost delighted terror, and ARDIANE, now beside herself, and wholly submerged in a more and more intolerable radiance, breaks all the remaining panes with heavy, hurried blows, in a kind of ecstatic delirium.*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Yet another pane !

Now, and now again !

Till they fall, great and small, shattered,
down to the last of all !

All the panes in ruin crack,

And O the flames are driving back

My hands, my hair !

I can see nothing now of what is
there !

Nor do I longer dare

To raise my lids, for now it seems

They are mad with fury, the dazzling
beams !

Stir not from where you were !

I can no longer stand upright,

But shut my eyes behold the sight

Of bright long strings of pearls, my eye-
lids lashing !

I know not what assails me, o'er me
dashing :

Is it the skies or else the seas,

Is it the light or else the breeze ?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

All my tresses bright have grown a torrent
of light,

And miracle all over me is flashing !

I see no longer, but I hear

A myriad rays of light beating on either
ear !

But how to hide my eyes I do not know,
For no shade now my two hands throw ;
My eyelids dazzle me ; my arms, that
try

To cover them, do cover, but with light !
Where are you ? Hither, all of you !
for I

Am helpless to descend ; I cannot see
aright ;

I see not, know not, where to press
My feet amid the surf of fire that sway
my dress !

Come hither, hither all, or I shall fall
Into your darkness !

[At this cry SELYSETTE and MELI-
SANDE leave the shadows where-

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

in they had taken refuge, and run to the window, their hands pressed upon their eyes, as though to pass through flame; and thus, groping in the light, they mount beside ARDIANE on the mass of rock. The others follow them, and do as they; and thus all crowd together in the stream of blinding radiance, which forces them to lower their heads. Then passes a moment of dazzled silence, during which is heard the murmur of the sea without, the caress of the wind among grasses, the song of birds, and the bells of a flock of sheep going by in a distant pasture.

SELYSETTE

I can hear the sea!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

And I can see the sky. . . .

[*Covering her eyes with the bend of
her arm.*

One cannot look !

ARDIANE

My eyes are growing calmer 'neath my
hands.

Where are we ?

BELLANGERE

Trees are all that I would see.
Where are they ?

YGRAINE *

O, but how the world is green !

ARDIANE

We are midway upon the cliff-side here.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

Down there—the village! Do you see
the village?

BELLANGERE

We cannot reach the village: all around
Is water, and the bridges all up-drawn.

SELYSETTE

Where are there people?

MELISANDE

There is a peasant there —
Yonder.

SELYSETTE

He saw—is looking at us now.
See, I will make a sign to him. . . .

[She waves her long hair.

He saw!

He saw my hair, he takes his bonnet off!
He makes the sign of the Cross!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

A bell, a bell ! [Counting the strokes.
Seven, eight, nine !

BELLANGERE

Ten . . . and eleven . . . twelve !

MELISANDE

So it is noon. . . .

YGRAINE

Who is it singing so ?

MELISANDE

Why, those are birds ! Do you see them ?
There they are !
There are thousands in the lofty poplar
trees
That grow along the river.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

Alladine!

Where is she, O where is she, Alladine?
For I would kiss her.

MELISANDE

Alladine is here,

* And I, I kiss her.

SELYSETTE

You—O Melisande,
You are so pale !

MELISANDE

You also, you are pale!
No, do not look at me! . . .

SELYSETTE

And see, your dress
Is all in tatters: I can see you through
it. . . .

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

And yours; for your uncovered breasts
appear,
Parting your tresses. . . . Do not look at
me.

BELLANGERE

How long our tresses are!

YGRAINE

How pale our cheeks!

BELLANGERE

The sun shines through our hands. . . .

MELISANDE

O, Alladine!

She is sobbing!

SELYSETTE

I am kissing, kissing her. . . .

ARDIANE

Ah yes, kiss one another: do not yet
Look in each other's faces: more than all

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

You shall⁴ not think that light will make
you sad.

You shall by your intoxication profit
To issue from the tomb. Here steps of
stone

Descend the cliff-side. Though I do not
know

Whither they lead, yet they are full of.
light,

And the free winds of heaven assail them.
Come!

Follow me all ! A thousand thousand rays
Are dancing, dancing on the crests of the
sea, !

[She goes out through the opening
and disappears in the light
without.

SELYSETTE (*who follows, drawing the
others after her*)

Come, yes, O come, my poor, my happy
sisters !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Let us too dance, dance, dance the dance
of the light !

*[They all climb the great stone and
disappear, singing in the brilli-
ance of outer day.]*

THE RECEDED VOICES

Orlamonde's five daughters
(The faery's days were o'er),
Orlamonde's five daughters
Found at last the door.

CURTAIN

ACT THE THIRD

The curtain rises on the same scene as in the First Act. The scattered jewels are still glistening in the niches, and on the marble floor. Between the pillars of the semi-circular colonnade are open coffers, overflowing with costly raiment. It is now night without, and under the hanging candelabra, the tapers of which are lit, ALLADINE, SELYSETTE, MELISANDE, YGRAINE and BELLANGERE are standing before the great mirrors, and each is giving the touches of completion to the dressing of her hair, or adjusting the folds of her glittering attire, or decking herself with jewels and flowers, while ARDIANE, passing

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

from one to the other, assists and advises them all. The great windows are open.

SELYSETTE

Though from the spell-bound castle we *
as yet
Discover no escape, yet wherefore fear,
Since he is here no longer ?

[*Embracing ARDIANE.*

We are happy,
And still, because you tarry with us, free.

MELISANDE

Where has he gone ?

ARDIANE

I know no more than you.
Yet gone he has. It may be he is troubled :
It may be for the first time disconcerted.
It well may be the anger of the peasants

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Left him uneasy ; he has felt their hate
Brim over : who shall say he has not gone
To search out guards or soldiers to chastise
The mutinous, and so return a master ?

MELISANDE

You will not go away ?

ARDIANE

How should I go,
When all the castle moats are brimming
full,
When all the drawbridges are hoisted high,
When all the doors and gates are locked
and barred,
When all the walls are inaccessible ?
Though none are seen to guard them,
none the less
The doors are not abandoned ; all our steps
Are closely spied ; he must have given out
Mysterious orders. But on every side

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

The peasants wait and watch upon the roads.

Meanwhile, my sisters, the eventful hour
Draws nigh ; we must be very beautiful.
But is it so that you prepare yourselves ?
Your hair was full of miracle, Melisande !
Below, it lit the darkness of the vaults,
Steadfast it smiled upon the night of the tomb,

And now you have extinguished every flame !

Again I come to liberate the light !

[She removes MELISANDE's veil,
cuts with her scissors the fillets
that constrain her tresses, and
all her hair suddenly flows
downwards, streaming resplendent over her shoulders.

YGRAINE (*turning about to look at
MELISANDE*)

O !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE (*also turning*)

I can hardly think it still is she !
She is so beautiful !

ARDIANE

And you, and you !
Those loveliest arms, where are they, Sely-
sette ?
What have you done ?

SELYSETTE

Within my silver sleeves,
Here are my arms.

ARDIANE

I cannot see them, no,
Not as I saw them but a while ago,
Saw those arms I worshipped so,
The while I watched you, saw you dress,
Every strand and every tress ;
They seemed as they were raised above

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Your head to reach, to appeal for love.
My loving eyes caressed your every gesture :
I turned about, and when I turn again
I see their shadow merely through their
vesture
That shone but now so bright. But now
these twain
Twin rays of happiness I liberate !

[She detaches the sleeves.

SELYSETTE

My poor bare arms ! O, they will shake
with cold !

ARDIANE

No, for they are too beautiful ! And
you,

[Turning to YGRAINE.

Ygraine, where are you ? For there shone
but now,
Deep in this mirror, shoulders, and a
throat,

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

That flooded it with happy, tender
light :

Come, I must liberate you all ! My
sisters,

In truth I do not wonder any more
He never loved you as he should have
loved,

Or that he coveted a hundred, yet
Possessed no woman.

[*Removing the mantle that YGRAINE
has thrown over her shoulders.*

O two fountain-heads
Of beauty into darkness cast away !
This above all : fear nothing ! And
to-night

Let us be beautiful !

[*The NURSE, haggard and dishevelled,
enters by a side door.*

THE NURSE

O, he is here !

He is returning !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE OTHERS

Who? Who? He? To-night? .

ARDIANE

Who told you?

SELYSETTE

Were you able to go out?

ARDIANE

Have you seen any one?

THE NURSE

Yes, yes, a guard!

He has seen you, he admires you!

ARDIANE

I have seen

No creature since the hour he went away.

All gates, all doors, of their own motion
close,

Though none knows how; the palace
seems deserted.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE

They hide, I say they hide,
And we are all espied
Forever here.

It was the youngest spoke to me ;
He is returning ; he must be,
He said, quite near.

The peasants are in arms. The peasants
know !

They are rising ! All the village is below,
Lurking among the hedges ! Hark ! A
cry !

[She mounts by one of the curving
lateral stairways to the win-
dows of the gallery.

There are torches in the copses going by !

[The women, terrified, give a cry of
horror, and run to and fro
through the hall, seeking a
point of exit. The NURSE en-
deavours to stop them.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE

Seek not to fly: you know the doors are shut.

Where would you go? Stay here, stay here, and wait!

SELYSETTE (*also mounting to the windows*)

O, the great chariot! It is stopping!

[*All mount the stairs to the windows, crowding together on the interior balcony, and leaning out into the night.*

MELISANDE

See!

Now he steps out! I see him! And he makes

Signs, signs of anger!

SELYSETTE

All around him stand
His negroes!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

And they all have naked swords
That glitter in the moon !

SELYSETTE (*taking refuge in ARDIANE's arms*)

O Ardiane !

O Ardiane, I am frightened !

THE NURSE

Do you see ?

The peasants are appearing ! There they come !

See, there again ! And O, they have their scythes,

Their pitch-forks !

SELYSETTE.

They are going to fight !

[Murmurs, cries, uproar, tumult, blasphemy, and the clashing of arms in the distance without.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

They fight !

YGRAINE

One of the negroes there has fallen !

THE NURSE

O,

The peasants, they are terrible ! Their
scythes !

They are so huge ! And all the village
there !

MELISANDE

O look, the negroes are deserting him !
They fly, they fly ! They are hiding in
the woods !

YGRAINE

And he is flying also ! Now he runs !
Now he is making for the castle court !

THE NURSE

The peasants after him !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

O, they will kill him!

THE NURSE

They are going out to help him! See
the guards!

They have opened wide the castle gates!

They run!

They run to help him!

SELYSETTE

One, two, three, four, five . . .
Now six . . . now seven. . . . There
are only seven!

THE NURSE

O look, the peasants are surrounding
them!

They are there in hundreds!

MELISANDE

O, what are they doing?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE

I see them dancing round about a man:
The rest have fallen !

SELYSETTE

And the man is he !
I caught a sight of his blue mantle
then :
He is lying on the grass !

THE NURSE

Now they are still !
Now they are raising him !

MELISANDE

O, is he hurt ?

YGRAINE

He staggers !

SELYSETTE

He is bleeding ! I saw blood !
Ardiane !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Come away then, look no more !
Hide your head here in my arms !

THE NURSE

They are bringing ropes !
They are disputing ! Now they tie his
limbs !

MELISANDE

Where are they going ? For they carry
him . . .
They are dancing, they are singing !

THE NURSE

Hither, see !
They are coming hither : see them on the
bridge !
The gates are opeh. They are halting. O,
They mean to cast him in the moat !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE AND THE OTHERS (*terrified, crying aloud, and rocking to and fro in desperation at the windows*)

No, no!
Help, help him! Do not kill him!
Help him, help!
No, no, not that! Not that! Not that!
Not that!

THE NURSE.

They do not hear. . . . The others
thrust them on. . . .

ARDIANE

He is saved!

THE NURSE

And now they are before the gate,
And now they seek to break into the
yard!

[*Cries from the Crowd, who have caught sight of the women at the windows. They then sing.*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE CROWD

Open! Open! Open! Open the door!
Open wide the door!
Open in God's name!
The candle gutters o'er,
The wick has no more flame!

THE WOMEN

We cannot! . . . It is barred! . . . They
break it in!
Hear it give way! They all are coming
in!
And now they struggle up the flight of
steps
Before the door below. . . . Beware!
Beware!
They are all drunken!

ARDIANE

I am going now
To unbar the door below. . . .

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE OTHERS

O Ardieane ! [Terrified and imploring.
No ! They are drunken ! Bolt it, Ardieane !
They are at the door !

ARDIANE

Fear nothing : stay you there,
Do not come down, for I will go alone.

[The five women descend the stairs
which lead down from the windows, and recoil towards the
nearer end of the hall, and there remain, grouped rigidly
together in an attitude of terrified attention. ARDIANE, fol-
lowed by the NURSE, goes to the
great central door, under the
colonnade, and throws back both
leaves of it. There is a sound
of trampling feet, of shouting,
singing, and laughter. The

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

foremost members of the crowd appear, amid the red glare of the torches, as it were framed in the doorway, which they entirely fill, but without crossing the threshold. They are folk of brutal appearance, savage or hilarious according to disposition ; their clothes are torn and disordered after their struggle. They are carrying BARBE BLEUE, who is tightly pinioned, and pause for a moment, disconcerted at the appearance of ARDIANE, who is standing before them grave, unperturbed, and imperial. At the same time, further back among those peasants who are crowded together on the flight of steps, and cannot see what is passing, there are cries, sudden

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

thrusts and pushes, shouts, and laughter that lasts a moment and is then extinguished by the perplexed and respectful whisperings of those about the door. At the moment of the invasion of the doorway by the crowd, the five women silently and instinctively fall on their knees at the end of the hall remoter from the door.

AN OLD PEASANT (*removing his bonnet and rolling it in his hands*)

Well, lady, can a man come in ?

ONE OF THOSE THAT CARRY BARBE BLEUE

You see,
He'll do you no more ill !

A THIRD PEASANT

He's heavy. . . . Ouf!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE FIRST PEASANT

Where would you have us put him?

ANOTHER PEASANT

Over there

Down in the corner.

[They lay BARBE BLEUE down.

There now, there he lies!

Now he will never stir again! No more!

Much evil has he done us!

ANOTHER PEASANT

Have you got

Somewhat to kill him with?

ARDIANE

Yes, never fear. . . .

THE PEASANT

Will you have some one help you?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

No, no need. . .

We shall do well.

A PEASANT

But look you have a care:
Beware lest he escape you !

[*Baring his chest.*

See you now,

What he has done to me !

ANOTHER PEASANT (*baring his arm*)

Now see my arm !
It came in here, and then out there it
went.

ARDIANE

You are all brave folk, but do you leave
us now.
We shall avenge ourselves, and well; but
now

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Leave us, I pray, for night is growing
late,
And see to all your wounds.

THE OLD PEASANT

Now show respect,
Because we are not savages, to ladies.
We shall not make a sound. . . . It is not,
lady,
Words, merely—but you are too beautiful.
Good-bye, good-bye.

ARDIANE (*closing the door*)

Good-bye; you have my thanks.
[She turns and sees the five
women on their knees at the
other end of the hall.

You were on your knees!

[Approaching BARBE BLEUE.
And you are wounded? Yes!
The blood is flowing here—'tis in the
neck—

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

'Tis nothing ; no, the wound is shallow.

This,

Here on the arm—but hurts upon the
arm

Are seldom very grave—but as for
this—

The bleeding will not stop : the hand is
pierced.

First we must dress it.

[*While ARDIANE is speaking the
five women draw nigh, one
by one, and without speaking
kneel or lean about BARBE
BLEUE.*]

SELYSETTE

His eyes are open now.

MELISANDE

How pale he is ! He must have suffered !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

O !

Those peasants are so terrible !

ARDIANE

Some water !

THE NURSE

Yes, I will go and seek some. . . .

ARDIANE

Have you linen ?

MELISANDE

Here is my kerchief.

SELYSETTE

He is stifling ! O,
Would you not have me hold his head up ?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue.

MELISANDE

Stay,

See, I will help you.

SELYSETTE

No, for Alladine
Is helping me.

[ALLADINE indeed is helping her to
raise BARBE BLEUE's head, and
she furtively kisses his forehead,
sobbing the while.]

MELISANDE

O softly, Alladine!
What are you doing?

SELYSETTE

How his forehead burns!

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

His beard is shaven, and he is not now
So terrible. . . .

SELYSETTE

Have you not some water? See,
His face is covered all with dust and
blood.

YGRAINE

He breathes with effort. . . .

ARDIANE

Yes, it is these cords,
They stifle him. The bonds are drawn,
so tight

A rock would crumble in them. . . .

Haye you not,
Some one, a knife?

Ardiane and Barbe Blue

YGRAINE

Two knives were on the table. . . .
Here is the larger.

[She gives it to ARDIANE.]

"THE NURSE (*who has returned with the water—terrified*)

You are going to . . .

ARDIANE

Yes.

THE NURSE

But he is not—you see . . . he looks at us!

ARDIANE

Raise well the cord, so I may do no hurt. . . .

[One by one she cuts the bonds which imprison BARBE BLEUE. When

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*she comes to those that pinion
his arms behind his back the
NURSE seizes her hands to check
her.*

THE NURSE

Wait till he speaks . . . we do not know
at all . . .

ARDIANE

Have you another knife? This blade
is broken. . . .

The cords are very hard.

MELISANDE (*giving her the knife*)

Here is the other.

ARDIANE

Thank you!

[*She cuts the last turns of the cord.*

Silence: the beating of their

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

hearts is heard. BARBE BLEUE, *feeling himself free, rises slowly to a sitting posture, his arms still benumbed, and moves his hands to make them supple.* He then regards each of the women about him fixedly, and in silence. Then, leaning against the wall, he stands upright and remains motionless, looking at his injured hand.

ARDIANE (*drawing near to him*)

Good-bye.

[She kisses him upon the brow. BARBE BLEUE makes an instinctive movement to detain her. She gently frees herself, and proceeds toward the door, followed by the NURSE.

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE (*running after her and stopping her*)

Ardiane, Ardiane!

Where are you going ?

ARDIANE

Far away from here,
Down yonder, where I am awaited still. . . .
Do you come with me, Selysette?

SELYSETTE

I too?

But when will you return ?

ARDIANE

I shall not.

MELISANDE

O!

Ardiane !

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Are you coming, Melisande?

[*MELISANDE looks to and fro from ARDIANE to BARBE BLEUE and does not reply.*

O see the open door, the far blue hills!

Ygraine, are you not coming?

[*YGRAINE does not turn her head.*

Now the moon,

The stars, illumine every road. And you,

Bellangere, do you come?

BELLANGERE (*shortly*)

No. . . .

ARDIANE

Alladine,

Do I go forth alone?

[*At these words ALLADINE runs to ARDIANE, throws herself into her arms, sobbing convulsively, and holds her in a long and feverish embrace.*

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE (*embracing her in turn, and softly disengaging herself, in tears*)

You too remain,
Alladine! O be happy! And fare-well. . . .

[She goes out hastily, followed by the NURSE. The five women look at one another and at BARBE BLEUE, who slowly raises his head. BELLANGERE and YGRAINE shrug their shoulders, and go to close the door. Silence.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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